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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 12, 1958

SUBJECT: Berlin Crisis

DEC 13 1958

PARTICIPANTS: Gunnar Jarring - Swedish Ambassador
Frederick Jandrey - Deputy Assistant Secretary - EUR
Foy Kohler - Deputy Assistant Secretary - EUR
William Kerrigan - BNA

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In response to Mr. Jarring's question, Mr. Kohler said that the Berlin crisis is being kept at a very dangerous pitch by the Russians. If there is any position in the world that we have tried to leave no room for misunderstanding about, to make clear is a vital Western interest - a real casus belli - it is Berlin. He said he found it surprising that the Russians were leaving themselves no escape hatch in their various public commitments to eject us from Berlin. Even the delayed six-month ultimatum didn't constitute such an out.

The Russians probably hope by their actions to find differences in Germany, and among the allies although it was doubtful they would.

The Russian position compels us to the legal position (which is entirely sound) that rights to Berlin - obtained by conquest - are not subject to transfer to agents, but only by redistribution among the principals.

To sum up, it presently appears that they are going to push the situation pretty close to the brink.

Mr. Kohler observed that there seemed to be some possibilities for discussion still open. For example, if Berlin were evacuated

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by all of the allies, it would be essential that there be UN troops, not merely observers, to preserve freedom in Berlin. Would Sweden be prepared to send several regiments?

Mr. Jarring answered that generally Sweden preferred to utilize its troops abroad under UN aegis, and that in any event it would be premature to answer the question now, to which Mr. Kohler agreed.

Mr. Jarring observed that another aspect of the German problem is the Oder-Neisse line; he doubted that even the East Germans are willing permanently to give up all thought of changing the line.

Mr. Jarring then inquired about the message carried by Senator Humphrey to the President.

Mr. Kohler observed that without commenting on specifics - which he was not privileged to do - that there did not seem to be any matters contained in the message that were substantially new.

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